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2003 - Szuzsanna
Horvath Human
Rights

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My name is Grattan Puxon, now living in England, I was resident in Eastern Europe for nearly twenty years and as General-Secretary of the World Romani Congress (1971-1981) visited Romani communities throughout the region. including Hungary. I speak Romanes, Serbian, some Bulgarian, as well as English and French.

I am the author of "Destiny of Europe's Gypsies", published in seven languages, and many articles on the subject of Roma, being a journalist by profession.

I have been requested by the Refugee Legal Centre at Oakington to provide some background information and opinion on the asylum application of Szuzsanna Horvath and I have read her Statement.

In making my comments, I have drawn upon my own personal knowledge of marriage within a Romani community and I am aware of my duty as an expert to assist the adjudicator to obtain as complete and accurate a picture as possible of the applicant's circumstances.

The subservience, not to say subjection, of females within many, but not all, Romani communities, is a subject of much concern generally to the Romani national movement. An International Romani Women's Network has recently been created, and women's NGOs such as *Daja* (Mothers) and *Djuvlia* (Women) are becoming more numerous. Only one woman, Nadezhda Demetera, serves in the Cabinet of the International Romani Union; seven are leading activities in the London-based Trans-European Roma Federation, of which I am secretary.

Szuzsanna Horvath is not known to me personally but what she says chimes immediately with what I have seen and experienced myself. Her history, which appears to me to be authentic, is unfortunately typical of girls married off at a young age and trapped within a traditional and conservative clan-structure (she refers to the sub-tribe of Kolumpa, which has members throughout Hungary).

In such a family environment, the young bride or *bori*, from the day she enters her in-laws' household is very much subservient to her mother-in-law (*sasui*). The young couple together are regarded and treated as junior members of the family. But while the son will enjoy the freedom to come and go, the *bori* is confined to the home and her household duties. In this case Szuzsanna and Attila appeared to have had their own apartment, at first. Nevertheless

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Attila's upbringing will have conditioned him to expect and impose complete control over his young wife. It is likely he felt it was his "right" to beat Szuzsanna and increase this violence to "save face" in front of other males, even more so in the absence of his own parents when the couple had separate accommodation.

Szuzsanna does not mention the fact yet she was almost certainly a virgin when married at 16 and her husband would take this as his right, and a matter of honour. His fury and feelings, of dishonour when she temporarily broke with him and, eventually, for a short time took up with someone else, as she states, are consistent with behaviour I have witnessed and noted in comparable Romani communities.

It is all too evident that Szuzsanna Horvath (which I can confirm is a common name among Roma in Hungary) was – until he escape to England – caught in a dangerous situation. Not only as a Romni, a wife, within an ultra-conservative clan but as an individual unhappily married to an evidently violent husband.

Szuzsanna, according to her statement, attempted on a number of occasions to find a way out of her situation. Notably, from the point of view of her asylum application, she has tried to find redress within her own country, within Hungary. She describes her attempts to obtain the help of the Hungarian police. For her efforts she has received only further humiliation, rejection and physical abuse, which I may say parallel many similar cases documented by the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest.

Finally, I note that her brother has come to her rescue and made it possible for her to reach the UK. Although her own family afforded her little or no protection during much of her marriage, (which often happens where a young *bori* enters her husband's clan) the action of the brother is also consistent with his role, as a Rom. Where a wife is ill-treated over a period of time, her male relatives are entitled to come to her rescue and in effect "claim her back".

My general comment, based on published material and personal contacts, is that the Hungarian state has failed Roma like Szuzsanna Horvath; failed to protect them against racists, failed to provide adequate housing, education and job opportunities. Indeed the situation of Roma has deteriorated in the past decade.

Racism against Roma is widespread, as a recent report (*Guardian*, 8 Jan) revealed. A family allocated a home in Nemetker found on their arrival that their road was blocked by residents telling them they were not welcome and should "Go back to India". The local mayor encouraged the demonstration. Karoly and Erzsebet Kolompar were warned that if they occupied the house it would be burned down.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Graham Puxa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

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STATEMENT OF SZUZSANNA HORVATH

I, Szuzsanna Horvath, currently detained at Oakington Reception Centre, say as follows:

I make this statement in support of my application for asylum in the UK.

1. My name is Szuzsanna Horvath. I was born on 21 August 1974, in Hungary. I am of Roma ethnic origin, of the sub-tribe Kolumpa. I speak Romany as my mother tongue. I also speak Hungarian, and a little English.
2. I have always had problems in Hungary because I am a gypsy. I grew up in LENGYELOTI, in the area of SOMOGY. I went to school there. Hungarian children bullied me – they would spit at me and hit me. Also the teachers did not like me. Gypsies were not allowed to go into some places, and everybody would call us names. It was hard growing up.
3. About twelve years ago, when I was sixteen or so, I married Attila Varadi in a traditional Roma ceremony. It was not a legal marriage, but we are married in our eyes and the eyes of my community. I have always thought of Attila as my husband.
4. We stayed living in Lengyeltoti, in a flat in a gypsy site. We had two children together, Attila, and Akos. Life was very hard for us as gypsies. The townspeople did not like us, and the police would beat gypsies for no reason. Sometimes they would come to the flat and kick the door in. They always blamed us when something was stolen. Once, when I was pregnant with Akos, the police came and took my husband away. It was not like a proper arrest, they just took him without a reason.
5. I went to the police station, and I could hear him being beaten. I was knocking on the door and a policeman opened the door. He told me that Attila was not there even though I could hear him moaning. He said many abusive things about gypsies, and he called me a smelly gypsy, and told me to go. Then he pushed me down the stairs. I was lucky that my cousin was there to help catch me, as I did not fall as badly as I might have done, but I was still hurt and scared.
6. My brother, Laszlo Keller, also had trouble with the police. They beat him too, for no reason. He made an official complaint about them to the military authorities – the next highest place. He had a letter back to say that it had been investigated and the police are not guilty. Afterwards the police took him and he was kicked around so badly that the police had to call the doctors themselves. Things were really hard for us at that time. There was a lot of pressure and fear, and it was around then that my problems with Attila started.

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7. The first he hit me was about seven years ago, I think. I remember that I was sitting on a chair. He had made friends with a bad group of lads in the gypsy community. They wanted him to go out drinking and I told him not to go because there would be girls there. I embarrassed him in front of his friends and he just turned on me. He gave me such a slap that three of my ear-rings were knocked out, and I fell to the floor.
8. He kept hitting me though, punching me, mainly in the shoulder. My cousin had to lie on top of me to get him to stop. When he did stop, he just turned around and went out drinking with his new friends. My shoulder was so bruised it was blue and green afterwards.
9. I did not report this first attack to the police. I want to clarify that because it reads in my interview as though I did. What I meant to explain was that I *did* go to the police about my husband's violence. I did not mean that I reported that specific attack. I was scared of the police and it was a big step for me to go, when I did.
10. After that first time it just kept happening, and he started to hit the children too. My eldest boy got the worst of it – he would hit him more than the little one. I think that it made him feel powerful and in control. For gypsy men it is normal to beat their wives. He would punch me, kick me, and hit me with anything that came to hand. It happened every other day, if not every day. It depended on his mood.
11. One night, I think that it was in June 1999, he tried to strangle me. I really believed that he was going to kill me. I had gone out after him, looking for him because I thought he was having an affair. I made him look shameful by following him. We went home. He was walking behind me and I he was angry and I knew I was going to get it. When we got home he threw me on the bed and picked up my head and started smacking it against the wall. Then he was choking me with his hands round my throat. He woke the children up and they came in crying. That stopped him, that time.
12. The next morning I had his fingerprints on my neck and I knew I had to go to the police. I had to summon up the courage to do it, so my mum came up to come with me because I was afraid to go on my own. She met me and walked with me there - she was too afraid to come into the police station with me, but she waited outside for me. It was Lengyeloti police station.
13. I went in with the bruises clear on my neck. The policemen there just laughed at me and showed me the door. They told me it was family business and to go away and to *'come talk to us when your blood is running'*. They made me feel stupid and helpless.
14. Around this time all the gypsy families were hoping to find a way to escape all these problems that we had been having. We had seen on

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the television that Canada was taking gypsies who were escaping racism in Europe.

15. In October 1999 my husband and I took our children and went to Canada to claim asylum. We were there until January 2003. Our lawyer was Elizabeth Jazsni. She was a Jewish-Hungarian solicitor-barrister and she represented us the whole time. At first, our case was refused, and we contested that decision to refuse us and we were accepted. Then there was another court case though, and this time they refused us again and there was no more that we could do. My brother and wife were recognised as refugees though, and given permission to stay in Canada. They live there now.
16. We lived in a flat in Toronto while we were in Canada. The children went to school and did well there – they learnt to speak English and they learnt how school should be. They were not beaten or bullied for being gypsies.
17. The problems with my husband continued though. Being in Canada did not change him like I had hoped. He would still hit us and hurt us. He did the same thing as at home too – he would beat me up, and then he would say 'Get your dirty face outside' and he would push me out of the door and make me stand outside till morning.
18. One day he did this and a man who was passing saw me and asked what was going on. Although I hid my injuries because I was ashamed, he called the police. This was, I think, in May 2000. The police came and they took him away. They have a special police who deal with this kind of thing. They took me, with the children, to a women's refuge. The refuge was on Queen Street, Toronto. It had a red door.
19. We were at the shelter for about two weeks, I think. Then they took me back home. Attila wasn't there. I think he was on probation. I was given a woman contact and she told me to call her if I had any problems. About two days later Attila came back to the flat and was banging on the door. I rang the police. Within two minutes, the police had rung me back with an interpreter. They sent someone out to me but by then Attila had run away. The police had a look round and then left.
20. We lived separately for about three months. Attila was still on probation, I think, and he did not hurt us during that time. While we were apart I met a man. I do not want to say his name here, but he was a coloured man. I saw him for a while, and for a bit we had a relationship. We broke up after a month though.
21. Then, after about three months, I made up with Attila. He is my children's father and he promised to change and said that he loved us. I didn't want to break up our family so I agreed to make peace and we tried again. For a little while it was OK and then it started again, the

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shouting and the hitting. Sometimes my older son went to school crying because his father had hit him before. He didn't dare tell anyone.

22. Attila kept hitting us and hurling us and I did not know what to do. It was worse than before because he knew about the relationship I had had with this man while we apart. He felt that I had shamed him and kept using this against me. It is a massive thing for a Roma man if his wife is unfaithful. He called me a 'nigger whore'.
23. There were lots of things he would do to me. He would pull my hair. Anything that was to hand, he would smash me with that. I always had bruises. I used to be pleased when the bruises were on my arms or somewhere I could hide them, but sometimes they would be on my face or neck.
24. Then, in 2001, he beat up my cousin, who was only fourteen. My cousin is not very well, mentally. He is only a boy and is nervous and unstable, and Attila really hurt him. I tried to stand up to him and I called the police again. The police couldn't do anything against him because the boy's mother took Attila's side. Most gypsies do not like getting the police involved and think that family business is private. Because of this she would not even support her own son.
25. The children and I were taken back to the shelter. We were there for a while until Attila found us. My eldest son was going to school from the shelter and Attila had been hiding outside and stopped him. He told him to go back and fetch me. My son came back and we told the shelter staff that he'd found us.
26. Then we were moved to another shelter further away – it was called Elismere Laurence. The shelters in Canada were most church buildings. We were there for about three months, and then I made peace with Attila again and went back to him.
27. I know how it sounds, but I wanted to believe that he could change – that he would realise that he loves us and that he would stop acting that way. It is hard for a gypsy woman to leave her husband, and I wanted the boys to have their father – I always told them that he loved them. I didn't really know what else to do. I just tried to save my family. There is a lot a woman will stand for to have a family unit and for the kids to have their father. I didn't have my father when I was growing up.
28. It was around this time, about four years ago, that Attila started to hurt me sexually too. I had stopped being able to touch or hug him the way I used to. Everything he wanted from me he started to take by force. I would turn away from him in bed and he would pinch me and scratch me to make me turn over. I couldn't kiss him and because of that he would smack me.

not co-operative
with
police

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29. I tried telling him I did not want sex but it made no difference. He would tell me what position to get into and I would just have to do what I was told while he performed on me. I was too frightened of him to do anything else and I did as I was told. I did not want it and a lot of the time it hurt me. This happened most days.
30. Sometimes I would try and push him off me but he would never finish until he was done. If he didn't want me like that then he would make me perform oral sex on him. He would not let me up until I was finished. I hated it. I never had a choice. I used to love him but when you can love someone you can hate them too. I couldn't talk about any of this to immigration because I am so ashamed. It is hard for me to talk about.
31. In January 2003, we were returned to Hungary. We were all worried about going back. At the airport in Hungary the immigration staff told us that we were traitors, that we had '*sold our country*', and laughed at us because we had been sent back.
32. Because lots of gypsies had left Lengeltoti, the town mayor had ordered for the gypsy site to be bulldozed so that we could not go back there. He didn't like gypsies, the mayor. I didn't like him much either. Because we knew that this had happened to our old home, on our return we had to go and live with my mother in OSKU, in the area of VESZPREM.
33. It was hard for all of us. The children were bullied a lot at school. They had got used to Canadian schools. My younger child spoke more English than Hungarian. By the third day back at school they were beaten up. They were getting a beating at home and then sent off to school to get another beating.
34. I complained to the headmistress of my sons' school that the teachers were hitting them and that the children were spitting at them. The headmistress just told me that my '*tongue had grown sharp*' in Canada. She didn't really care about my boys.
35. It had made no difference to my husband that we were in my mother's house, and the violence continued. He would not look for a job. It was hard for us to find jobs, because people do not like to employ Roma, but he would not even look for work. He would sit in armchair and give us instructions.
36. I got temporary or seasonal work whenever I could, like fruit picking. I would take the kids with me so they did not have to stay in the house with him. I was happy to work and be out of his way.
37. My mother was really frightened of Attila. He warned her not to get involved and she did not feel that there was anything that they could do. His violence could start at any time. He could just wake up and start on me. And literally I just had to go in a corner. There was one time I

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lost it and I smacked him with my fist and he was so enraged I got the worst beating. He is so bitter inside now. He never looked at me or the kids with love.

38. He would slap them around or kick them in the bum. He's a big guy with big feet and hands. He would find any reason for it. When my little boy accidentally broke my neck-chain he really smacked him around for that. How he wanted us to be, that's how it had to be. Dinner had to be cooked for a certain time or I would know what was coming. It was like a game of chess. Small movements. We would tiptoe around trying to please him. When he went out we would hold hands and say 'Thank God'.
39. In February, he kicked me so much in the stomach that I started to bleed. I was ashamed, but the bleeding did not stop and in the end I had to go to hospital for an operation. I went to Veszprem hospital. This was in March 2003. The doctors at the hospital did not ask what had happened.
40. I tried going to the police again. I was really scared because of how the police in Lengyeloti had been with me before, but I wanted to do something to stop it. The police at Varpalota were the same. They were pulling faces and laughing at me – they just said '*There is the door. Please leave now.*' They would not listen to me.
41. I just had to go home. The beatings from Attila got worse, if anything. He was so angry with me for the relationship I had had in Canada that he would use it against me all the time. He was also very resentful about the times the police had taken him away in Canada and the times I had left him. I had hurt his pride and I think that it made him feel powerful to hurt us.
42. Often he would beat me in front of his friends. It is normal behaviour for many gypsy men. Some of them even liked to watch. There were lots of things he would do to me. His favourite was to put two fingers into my nose, really hard, and pull me round like that, hooking the inside of my nose. It hurt me so much; it was his favourite.
43. The next time I went to the police it was the same. When a gypsy goes to them they have ways of showing you that they are not interested. I did not know what else to do, or where else to go. I can't remember the date this time. When you know that they don't care it's hard to feel like it matters.
44. In April, I think it was, of 2003, my cousin called me and said that Gypsy Chief was visiting and that he would talk to us. The gypsies have a kind of council, which deals with people's problems. As far as I am aware the council is made up only of men.

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45. I think that the Chief's gypsy-name was Kolumpa. He came to our place, and as is traditional, we talked for a while in Romany about small things. Then he asked us about our problems. We said about the trouble that the kids were having in school, and about how the mayor in Lengeltoti had bulldozed the gypsy site. We told him how people treated us.
46. I could not tell him about the problems I was having with my husband. He is a man. We can't talk about things like that with men. If I had, he would only have made me feel bad. It would also have made things worse with Attila if I had shamed him like that. In any case, the Chief did nothing about the complaints we did make.
47. I went to the police for the last time in May (2003). I did not know what else to do. I was desperate. Attila had come home drunk, early in the morning, and was threatening us all with a knife. He was saying that he would cut our throats.
48. I went to the police at Varpalota police station and asked them to help and said how bad it was. They laughed at me and called me a 'smelly gypsy'. I don't think it's because I'm smelly, it's just what they say to us. They said it was a family matter and not their problem.
49. You can't really complain about the police in Hungary. The minute the case is written it goes in the bin. And then a week later the policeman will find you. I have said what happened to my brother when he complained. Why would I do that to myself?
50. As the year had gone on I was getting to the point where I didn't know what to do. Thinking about it now, it was kill him, or kill myself, I felt so desperate. I was in such a state that I couldn't control my thoughts any longer. I had millions of thoughts.
51. In my community a woman leaving her man is a big thing. They will say that you are a slag, a whore. It doesn't really matter in Romany culture whether you get a divorce, you will always be his woman. You are his. Even if he marries another woman, he will still smack his first wife around and use her sexually. This is my culture. I am not proud of this part of it.
52. I don't know of any shelters for abused women in Hungary. I don't know, but I don't think there are any because I saw a TV programme that said there is no place for women and kids to go. In any case, I knew that the police would not take me seriously.
53. I had to get away from him, and so in June (2003) I started looking for somewhere to run away to. I was afraid that Attila would find me anywhere I went, because the gypsy community sticks together, but I had to try and do something because I was scared by now that he would end up killing us.

unable to
find redress
in Hungary

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54. I started calling landlords, looking for flats in the big cities, where I thought it might be harder for him to find me. I could not call from home because we did not have a phone that made outgoing calls, and anyway I had to keep it secret from Attila. My eldest son used to keep watch for me while I made the calls, in case Attila was coming. We had to hide all the money for the phone from him. My son would lie and say that he had bought sweets with the money I'd earned to keep it hidden from him. I know it wasn't nice for him to lie but it was necessity.
55. I called many, many landlords in SZOMBATHELY, BUDAPEST and GYOR. For about a month I made maybe six or seven calls nearly every day. You had to call the landlord for them to give you an appointment to talk about the flat. I never even got an appointment. For most of them it was enough to hear that I have a gypsy name.
56. Some people did not even have to ask my name. I have a strong accent and they could tell I was a gypsy just by hearing me speak. (My interpreter here at Oakington agreed that she would know I was a gypsy just by my voice.) Some of the landlords even asked me outright if I was a gypsy.
57. It was costing me a lot of money feeding the telephone box. I was getting nowhere, and I would kick the phone box in anger. There is no point going anywhere in person because they take one look at you and know you are a gypsy. No-one wants to rent a flat to a gypsy, and especially not a gypsy woman and her children. I could not go anywhere without having somewhere to live. It is not just me that has to hide - it is the children. We all have to be safe.
58. I could not find anywhere, and I could not stay there with him, always being afraid of what he was going to do to us. What I had was not a life. I thought I had to leave or kill myself, because there's no meaning to it anymore. If it wasn't for the kids I wouldn't be here - I would have committed suicide by now. It all got too much for me.
59. When I last told Attila I'd leave him because he wouldn't change, he said that he'd break my neck backwards. If I can't be his he won't let me be anyone's. He said he'd do the same to the children.
60. Hungary is not a big country, and I am afraid that he would be able to find me wherever I went. In the gypsy culture the community is small and connected. It would have been easy for him to find me. I would be easy to track down. It would not be easy for me to hide myself among Hungarians who don't like gypsies. Attila is of the Bajas clan and has family in different parts of Hungary. He has eight brothers. His grandparents live in NAGYKANZSA, his mother in BOHONYE, and he has an uncle in SZEKESFEHRVAR. There are lots of them in lots of different places in Hungary.

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61. When I decided that I had to run away I wanted to get as far away from him as possible. I decided England because it is far away, and because there is not discrimination in England. My children will not be hit and spat at here. Also, they speak some English.
62. We left Hungary without Attila knowing on 12 August 2003. I travelled to the UK by car with my brother and his girlfriend. My brother just wanted to get me away from Attila. Most gypsy men would not interfere with another man and his wife, even if that woman was his sister, because it would be shameful for the family, but my mother brought him up different.
63. When we arrived in the UK I said I was a tourist. I wanted to claim asylum straight away, but I thought that the way to do that was to go to the asylum centre. I didn't know that I should ask the officer who stamped my passport.
64. It was always my intention to claim asylum because all I wanted was to be safe with my children, but it took me a few days to get my courage up, and then to find the centre. We got lost looking for it. We went to a centre that looks after children. It was in London, near the bridges. They gave me an address for immigration, and we went there. It was not the right office but they gave me a map for the centre at Croydon. Then I went there, on 19 August, and explained I needed asylum. They asked me to come back, twice, and I did so both times.
65. My mother was worried about us going, but she agreed with it, I think. She knew that if I stayed in Hungary then Attila will find me. She knows where we have gone but she has not told anyone else. I spoke to her after I arrived in the UK, and Attila was still at her flat. I don't know if he is still there now because I have not spoken to her since I came to Oakington.
66. I am really scared that Attila will tell the police that I have run away, or that I have kidnapped our children. If I am returned to Hungary I am scared that the police would just take me back to him. I know that, if he found me, he would kill me for leaving him. I have brought a lot of shame on him. I know from speaking to my mother that he is looking for us. Other relatives of ours have told her that he is asking about where we have gone. It's really bad for him that his family have left him. It's like he has been broken in front of other people.
67. I am afraid to return to Hungary because I am sure that Attila will find me, and if he does he will kill me. The police do not take these problems seriously, and as a gypsy there is nowhere in Hungary I can go to be safe. It is for these reasons that I claim asylum in the UK.
68. I have had this statement read back to me in Hungarian, and I declare that it is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that it is an accurate account of my reasons for claiming asylum in the UK.

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Signed Donath Luvana

Dated 27/08/03

I am a Hungarian interpreter and I declare that I have read this statement to the applicant accurately and in full.

Signed [Signature]

Dated